

Filipino Teachers Cultural Adaptation: A Phenomenological Study in Malaysian International School

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Filipino international teachers in Malaysia as they navigated the complexities of pedagogical and cultural adaptation. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with six (6) educators who had at least two years of teaching experience in Malaysian international school contexts. The narratives were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis to ensure a systematic and rigorous interpretation of participants' accounts. The analysis yielded three salient themes: (1) Socio-Pedagogical Transition, referring to teachers' adjustment from traditional, teacher-centered instruction to student-centered and inquiry-based curricula such as the International Baccalaureate (IB)

and IGCSE; (2) Intercultural Evolution, describing the development of heightened cultural and religious sensitivity as a means of sustaining classroom harmony; and (3) Professional Resilience, reflecting how adaptation challenges functioned as catalysts for strengthened self-efficacy and pedagogical competence. Overall, the findings suggest that while Filipino international teachers demonstrate strong adaptive capacity, sustained effectiveness in multicultural settings is shaped by ongoing cultural reflexivity and instructional flexibility. In light of these findings, the study advances a Professional Support Framework for Filipino International Teachers. The framework underscores the importance of structured peer mentorship, sustained intercultural training, and collaborative professional learning communities. It reframes adaptation not as an individual burden but as an institutional responsibility, aimed at promoting teacher well-being, enhancing professional growth, and strengthening instructional practice within diverse educational environments.

Keywords: *Cultural Adaptation, Filipino International Teachers, International Schools, Malaysia, Phenomenological Study, Pedagogical Shift.*

INTRODUCTION

The increasing mobility of educators across national borders has become a significant feature of contemporary education, creating opportunities for teachers to work in culturally diverse environments. Among those contributing to international education are Filipino teachers, who have established a strong presence in Malaysia's growing international and private school sector. Many are employed in major urban centers such as Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, and Penang, where they teach students from various cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Their strong English proficiency, dedication to teaching, and student-centered approach have made them valuable members of many school communities.

While teaching abroad offers professional growth and career opportunities, it also presents challenges that extend beyond classroom instruction. Filipino teachers working in Malaysia must navigate a multicultural society shaped by Malay, Chinese, Indian, and other international influences. Differences in communication styles, social norms, and educational expectations often require teachers to modify their practices and develop a deeper understanding of the local culture. Values such as respect for hierarchy, indirect communication, and the maintenance of social harmony may differ from the educational experiences and interpersonal interactions to which many Filipino teachers are accustomed. Consequently, adapting to a new cultural environment becomes an important aspect of their professional and personal lives.

In addition to cultural adjustments, Filipino teachers often work within educational systems that emphasize academic achievement and adherence to established curricula such as the Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), the International Baccalaureate (IB), and national educational frameworks. Despite these structured environments, many educators continue to employ interactive and learner-centered teaching approaches that encourage participation, collaboration, and critical thinking. Their experiences demonstrate how international teachers negotiate institutional expectations while remaining responsive to the needs of diverse learners. Beyond their instructional responsibilities, they frequently participate in co-curricular activities, school events, and community engagements that further facilitate their integration into the school culture.

Given these realities, understanding how Filipino teachers adapt to life and work in Malaysia is essential. Their experiences offer valuable insights into the processes of cultural adjustment, professional adaptation, and identity formation within an international educational context. Exploring these experiences may also contribute to a broader understanding of the challenges and opportunities encountered by educators who work across cultural boundaries.

To provide a framework for examining these experiences, this study draws upon Berry's Acculturation Theory and Earley and Ang's Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Theory. Berry's theory explains how individuals respond to cultural transitions through strategies of assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. In contrast, Cultural Intelligence Theory focuses on the capabilities that enable individuals to function effectively in culturally diverse settings, including cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions. Together, these theoretical perspectives offer a comprehensive lens for understanding how Filipino teachers adapt to unfamiliar cultural environments while maintaining professional effectiveness and personal well-being.

Guided by these theoretical foundations, the study examines the cultural adaptation experiences of Filipino international teachers in Malaysia. Specifically, it seeks to understand how they navigate cultural differences, develop intercultural competencies, negotiate their professional identities, and establish a sense of belonging within Malaysian school communities. Through an exploration of their lived experiences, the study aims to contribute to existing knowledge on cultural adaptation, international teacher mobility, and the experiences of Filipino educators working in global educational settings.

Theoretical Lens

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives that provide a framework for understanding the cultural adaptation experiences of Filipino international teachers in Malaysia: Berry's Acculturation Theory and Earley and Ang's Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Theory. Together, these theories offer insight into how individuals adjust to new cultural environments and develop the competencies necessary to function effectively within diverse social and professional contexts.

Berry's Acculturation Theory explains the different ways individuals respond when encountering a culture that differs from their own. The theory identifies four acculturation strategies—assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization—which describe how individuals manage the relationship between maintaining their original cultural identity and engaging with the host culture. In the context of

this study, these strategies provide a lens for understanding how Filipino teachers navigate cultural differences, adapt to local expectations, and establish their place within Malaysian school communities.

Complementing this perspective, Cultural Intelligence Theory focuses on an individual's capacity to interact effectively across cultures. Earley and Ang propose that cultural intelligence consists of four dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. These dimensions help explain how individuals acquire cultural knowledge, reflect on intercultural experiences, maintain the motivation to adapt, and demonstrate appropriate behaviors in culturally diverse settings. For Filipino teachers working in Malaysia, cultural intelligence may influence how they communicate, build relationships, respond to unfamiliar situations, and adjust their professional practices within multicultural educational environments. The inquiry begins with the lived experiences of Filipino international teachers, which serve as the primary source of understanding in this phenomenological study. Through the lens of Acculturation Theory, the study examines how participants interpret and respond to cultural differences encountered in their personal and professional lives. At the same time, Cultural Intelligence Theory provides a framework for exploring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that support their adjustment and effectiveness within Malaysian schools.

By integrating these two theoretical perspectives, the study recognizes that cultural adaptation involves both external and internal processes. Adaptation is not limited to adjusting to the norms and expectations of the host culture; it also involves developing the capacities necessary to navigate intercultural interactions successfully. This combined framework enables a deeper understanding of how Filipino teachers negotiate cultural challenges, reshape their professional identities, and cultivate a sense of belonging within Malaysia's multicultural educational landscape. Ultimately, the theoretical lens highlights the dynamic relationship between acculturation, cultural intelligence, and the lived experiences of Filipino international teachers as they adapt to their host environment.

Conceptual Paradigm

This study is anchored on Berry's Acculturation Theory and Earley and Ang's Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Theory, which together explain how Filipino international teachers adapt to new cultural environments and develop the competencies needed to function effectively across cultures.

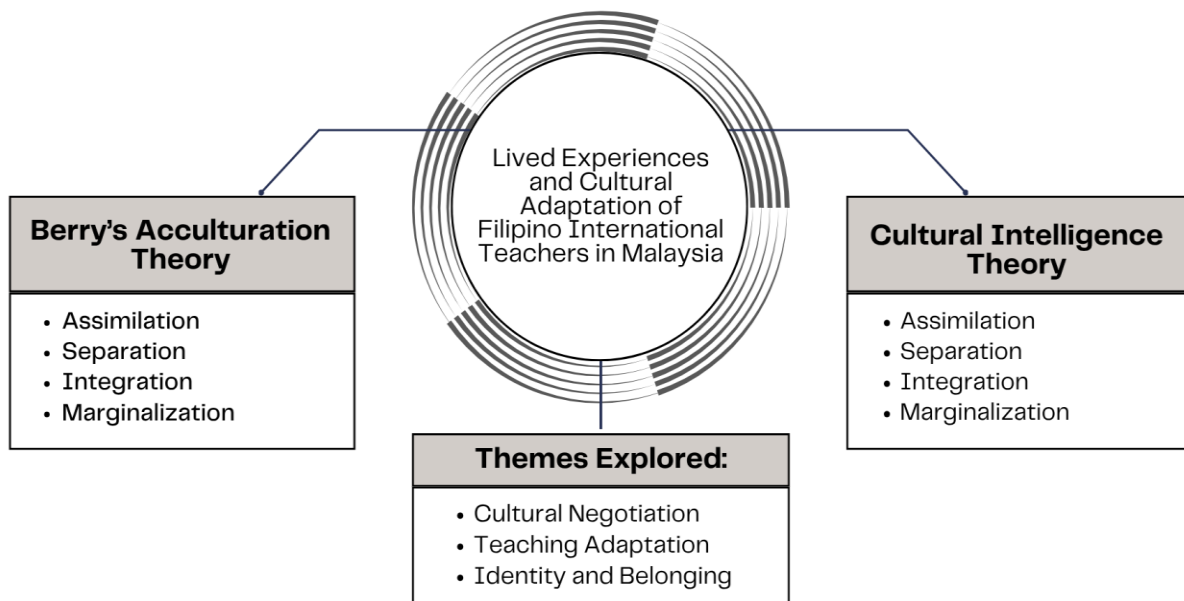


Figure 1. *Research Paradigm*

Statement of the Problem

Filipino teachers in Malaysia face challenges adapting to a new cultural and educational environment, despite their strong teaching credentials and high English proficiency. They encounter differences in classroom management, communication styles, curriculum expectations, and student behavior shaped by Malaysia's multicultural society (Malay, Chinese, Indian, and international students). Understanding how they experience and respond to these cultural differences is key to supporting their integration and enhancing their teaching effectiveness and well-being abroad.

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of Filipino international teachers in Malaysia and how they have culturally adapted in the classroom setting.

1. What are the lived experiences of Filipino international teachers in Malaysia as they cope with and adapt to cultural differences in their teaching practice?
2. How do these challenges affect their teaching performance, confidence, and relationships with students and colleagues?
3. Based on the findings, what solutions or approaches may be proposed to support Filipino teachers in enhancing their teaching performance, confidence, and relationships with students and colleagues?

Literature Review

Globalization and International Teaching Opportunities

Globalization has transformed education into a transnational profession, enabling the movement of teachers across borders in response to global demand, particularly in English-medium instruction contexts. Filipino teachers have become part of this global mobility due to their strong English proficiency, adaptability, and capacity to work in diverse educational environments.

However, international teaching is not simply a labor shift but a complex professional transition. As Uytico and Abadiano (2020) note, it requires adaptability, resilience, and cultural sensitivity in navigating unfamiliar pedagogical systems and diverse learners. Shiveley and Misco (2015) further describe this mobility as a transformative process that reshapes teachers' reflective practice and professional identity.

In Malaysia, this transformation is evident as teachers shift from the Philippine DepEd system to international curricula such as IB and Cambridge, which emphasize inquiry-based and student-centered learning. This shift highlights teaching as an ongoing negotiation rather than a fixed adjustment process (Enns-Kananen & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2023). Consequently, Filipino teachers operate within overlapping professional, cultural, and economic forces that continuously shape their teaching practice and identity formation.

Motivations for Teaching Abroad

Teacher mobility is driven by intersecting economic, professional, and ideological motivations. Many educators pursue international teaching to expand their professional competencies and engage with global pedagogical trends (Toraman et al., 2020). For Filipino teachers, economic stability remains a significant factor, particularly in supporting extended family needs (Bautista & Tamayo, 2020).

Beyond financial considerations, teaching abroad is also shaped by professional values aligned with international-mindedness and progressive education philosophies (Bunnell & Poole, 2021; Rey et al., 2020). In Malaysia, these motivations intersect with institutional demand for English-proficient and adaptable educators, reinforcing international teaching as both an economic and identity-driven career pathway.

Challenges of Teaching Abroad

Despite the professional opportunities associated with international teaching, educators encounter a range of challenges that test their adaptability, resilience, and cultural competence. Gul and Gökçe (2020)

categorize these challenges into professional, cultural, and institutional dimensions, which together illustrate the multidimensional nature of teaching in international contexts.

At the professional level, teachers are required to transition from familiar, often exam-oriented instructional approaches to more student-centered and inquiry-based pedagogies. This shift demands significant pedagogical flexibility, particularly when working within international curricula that emphasize critical thinking and learner autonomy. Culturally, teachers engage with increasingly diverse classrooms composed of students from varied ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In the Malaysian context, Garcia (2021) notes that Filipino teachers frequently interact with Malay, Chinese, Indian, and expatriate learners, each bringing distinct cultural expectations that shape classroom communication, behavior, and engagement. This diversity necessitates culturally responsive classroom management practices that promote inclusion and meaningful participation.

Institutionally, teachers must also respond to heavy workloads, administrative requirements, and performance expectations associated with international school standards. Alicamen and Becamon (2022) emphasize that responsibilities such as lesson planning, co-curricular involvement, and continuous professional development may contribute to stress and professional fatigue. When combined, these professional, cultural, and institutional demands highlight the need for adaptive capacity in sustaining teaching effectiveness in international settings.

In response to these challenges, research underscores the importance of coping strategies that integrate both individual agency and social support. Peer collaboration, reflective practice, and culturally responsive teaching have been identified as key mechanisms that support adaptation and professional resilience (Dizon & Nanquil, 2024; Apao & Naparan, 2024). Collectively, these strategies enable teachers to align their instructional practices with institutional expectations while maintaining effectiveness in culturally diverse classrooms.

Cultural Adaptation and Intercultural Understanding

Cultural adaptation is central to the professional experiences of international teachers. It is not a static adjustment but an ongoing process shaped by continuous interaction with diverse learners, institutional norms, and host-country cultural expectations. Kong (2020) emphasizes that multicultural classroom environments foster intercultural sensitivity and encourage teachers to adopt inclusive pedagogical approaches. Similarly, Schartner, Young, and Snodin (2022) describe intercultural adjustment as an iterative process influenced by linguistic, social, and institutional factors.

From a psychological perspective, Johnson (2022) highlights that self-efficacy and emotional resilience play important roles in teachers' ability to manage cross-cultural demands. In addition, Le Roujia and Mahamad (2024) point to contextual challenges such as religious practices, communication styles, and school traditions, all of which require ongoing cultural interpretation and behavioral adaptation.

Taken together, these studies suggest that cultural adaptation involves both cognitive understanding and emotional adjustment, requiring teachers to continuously recalibrate their practices in response to their evolving environment.

Coping, Resilience, and Social Support

Resilience and social support are critical factors in sustaining Filipino teachers' effectiveness in international contexts. In Malaysia, where educators face cultural diversity, unfamiliar curricula, and institutional pressures, emotional and psychological resilience becomes essential for maintaining well-being and performance.

Garcia (2021) notes that Filipino teachers often rely on peer networks within schools to share strategies, exchange experiences, and reduce professional isolation. This collegial support fosters both practical assistance and emotional reassurance in managing daily teaching challenges. Complementing this, Modesto (2020) and Reyes et al. (2020) highlight that personal traits such as optimism, sociability, and

relational orientation—deeply rooted in Filipino cultural values—enhance teachers’ ability to cope with adversity.

Beyond the workplace, engagement in school activities and community participation further strengthens teachers’ sense of belonging (Santos & Lee, 2020; Yan & Cruz, 2022). These social connections function as protective factors against stress, homesickness, and cultural dislocation.

Overall, coping strategies, resilience, and social support operate in an interconnected manner. Their combined effect enables Filipino teachers to maintain both professional effectiveness and psychological well-being in demanding cross-cultural environments.

Pedagogical Adjustments and Inclusive Practices

Effective teaching in international contexts requires continuous pedagogical adjustment. Filipino teachers in Malaysian international schools work within highly diverse classrooms, requiring them to adapt instruction to meet varying learner needs. Bulawat (2021) highlights that this includes modifying language use, simplifying instructions, and employing scaffolding strategies to enhance comprehension among students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Inclusive pedagogy is further strengthened through collaboration and professional dialogue. Apao and Naparan (2024) and Dizon and Nanquil (2024) emphasize that peer observation, reflective discussion, and shared practice enable teachers to align their strategies with curricular expectations such as IB and Cambridge frameworks. These collaborative processes support context-specific learning and instructional refinement.

At a broader level, Çelik (2025) argues that educators must adopt globally oriented pedagogical perspectives that integrate multicultural understanding into classroom practice. Sjøen (2023) further supports this by showing that international exposure enhances teachers’ intercultural competence and instructional flexibility.

Thus, pedagogical adaptation emerges as a dynamic process involving reflection, collaboration, and cultural responsiveness, ensuring both academic effectiveness and inclusive learning environments.

Professional Growth, Identity, and International Teacher Mobility

International teaching significantly influences professional identity and career development. Hur et al. (2024) note that even short-term international experiences can lead to transformative learning, prompting educators to re-evaluate their beliefs and teaching practices. Lin, Lin, and Lee (2025) further highlight improvements in cultural intelligence and instructional adaptability as key outcomes of international exposure.

However, teacher mobility is also shaped by institutional conditions. Merchant and Ingersoll (2024) observe that mismatches between expectations and workplace realities may lead to attrition, while Norris (2024) emphasizes that supportive leadership and positive organizational culture enhance retention.

Within this context, expatriate teachers continuously negotiate their professional identities as they align personal values with host-country expectations (Al-Hadhrami, 2024). Moreover, ideological orientations toward international-mindedness and progressive education further influence teachers’ decisions to work in global school environments (Bunnell & Poole, 2021; Rey et al., 2020).

Synthesis

The reviewed literature collectively indicates that international teaching functions both as a site of professional enrichment and as a context characterized by multifaceted challenges. Filipino teachers’ participation in overseas employment is shaped by interconnected economic, professional, and ideological motivations. Economic considerations, including higher remuneration and the capacity to support extended family needs, remain strong drivers of migration decisions (Bautista & Tamayo, 2020). At the same time, professional motivations reflect a desire to gain international experience, enhance pedagogical competence, and strengthen global competitiveness (Toraman, Ozdemir, & Orakci, 2020; Uytico & Abadiano, 2020). In

addition, engagement in “ideological” international schools aligns with educators’ values of international-mindedness and progressive education, underscoring commitments to global citizenship and intercultural awareness (Bunnell & Poole, 2021; Rey et al., 2020).

Despite these opportunities, international teaching is accompanied by complex and interrelated challenges that require sustained adaptability, resilience, and cultural competence. Professional, cultural, and institutional demands—ranging from unfamiliar curricula and assessment systems to multicultural classroom dynamics and heavy workloads—necessitate continuous adjustment and reflective practice (Gul & Gokce, 2020; Garcia, 2021; Alicamen & Becamon, 2022; Dizon & Nanquil, 2024; Apao & Naparan, 2024). Within this context, cultural adaptation and intercultural understanding emerge as essential processes, wherein teachers develop openness, patience, and sensitivity to diverse learner needs while navigating evolving classroom and institutional expectations (Kong, 2020; Schartner, Young, & Snodin, 2022; Johnson, 2022; Le Roujia & Mahamad, 2024).

In response to these challenges, Filipino teachers employ coping strategies grounded in collaboration, social support, optimism, and relational engagement. These strategies highlight the importance of both formal and informal professional networks in sustaining well-being and maintaining instructional effectiveness (Garcia, 2021; Modesto, 2020; Reyes et al., 2020; Santos & Lee, 2020; Tan & Cruz, 2022). Such coping mechanisms are further reinforced by pedagogical flexibility, inclusive teaching practices, and reflective engagement with colleagues, enabling teachers to reconcile global curricular standards with local classroom realities (Bulawat, 2021; Apao & Naparan, 2024; Dizon & Nanquil, 2024; Çelik, 2025; Sjøen, 2023).

Finally, international teaching significantly shapes professional identity, cultural intelligence, and career trajectories. Exposure to transnational educational environments fosters transformative learning that enhances confidence, pedagogical adaptability, and intercultural competence (Hur et al., 2024; Lin, Lin, & Lee, 2025). However, teacher mobility is also contingent upon institutional support, leadership quality, and organizational culture, which collectively influence retention and professional integration (Merchant & Ingersoll, 2024; Norris, 2024). Within this process, expatriate teachers continuously negotiate personal, cultural, and professional identities, highlighting the enduring influence of socio-cultural and religious contexts in shaping their experiences abroad (Al-Hadhrami, 2024).

Collectively, the literature portrays Filipino teachers as highly adaptable professionals operating at the intersection of ambition, responsibility, and global educational expectations. Their experiences extend beyond economic migration, reflecting the complex interplay of identity formation, pedagogical adaptation, and intercultural engagement within transnational education spaces. This synthesis underscores the importance of foregrounding Filipino teachers’ lived experiences in order to better understand how they sustain professional growth, cultural competence, and personal well-being within diverse and evolving international school environments.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and interpret the lived experiences of Filipino international teachers in Malaysia as they undergo cultural adaptation within their teaching environments. A phenomenological approach was deemed appropriate as it focuses on how individuals construct meaning from their lived experiences within a specific context.

As Creswell (2013) notes, phenomenology seeks to describe the shared meaning of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals, with the aim of uncovering its essential structure. Rather than aiming for generalization, this study focused on capturing the essence of participants’ cultural adjustment experiences in educational settings through rich, narrative-based accounts.

Selection of Co-participants

In alignment with phenomenological principles, the participants were treated as co-participants, emphasizing their active role in meaning-making. Their lived experiences served as the foundation of the study and were central to understanding the phenomenon of cultural adaptation.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select six (6) Filipino international teachers currently working in international or private schools in Malaysia. This approach ensured that participants had direct and relevant experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Efforts were made to include variation in school contexts to better reflect the diversity of experiences among Filipino educators abroad.

All participants were Filipino nationals with prior teaching experience in the Philippines before relocating to Malaysia. Each had at least two (2) years of teaching experience in Malaysia, ensuring sufficient exposure to the cultural, institutional, and pedagogical adjustments required in their new environment. Participants also represented different teaching levels (primary and secondary) and curricular frameworks, including IB, Cambridge, and IGCSE.

Their narratives were not treated as mere data sources but as co-constructed knowledge that provides insight into cultural negotiation, professional adjustment, and identity transformation within multicultural school environments.

Data Generation

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which served as the primary method for eliciting detailed narratives and personal reflections. This approach allowed for guided but flexible conversations, enabling participants to express their experiences freely while remaining aligned with the study's objectives (Seidman, 2019).

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or via online platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet, depending on participant availability. Prior to each interview, informed consent was obtained, and participation was emphasized as voluntary.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of participants' expressions, including tone, pauses, and emotional nuances, which are essential in phenomenological analysis.

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. This approach was selected for its systematic yet flexible nature, allowing themes to emerge inductively from the data rather than being imposed a priori. This ensured that findings remained grounded in participants' actual experiences.

To enhance rigor, reflective field notes were maintained throughout the data collection process, documenting non-verbal cues and the researcher's initial impressions. Member checking was also conducted by returning transcripts and preliminary interpretations to participants for validation, ensuring accuracy and credibility of the findings.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study to protect participants' rights, dignity, and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Anonymity was ensured through the use of pseudonyms, and all data were securely stored in encrypted files accessible only to the researcher.

To enhance trustworthiness, multiple strategies were applied. Member checking was conducted to validate interpretations with participants (Smith & Nizza, 2021). Data triangulation was achieved through the use of interview transcripts, reflective notes, and observational insights. Peer debriefing was also employed to minimize researcher bias and strengthen analytical rigor (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Dependability was ensured through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting all research decisions and analytic procedures. A code-recode strategy was also used to verify the consistency of emerging themes over time. A transparent description of the methodology further supports the replicability and rigor of the study (Nowell et al., 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Thematic Reflections

From the in-depth interviews conducted with Filipino international teachers in Malaysia, several major themes emerged that reflected their cultural adaptation experiences in the teaching context. These themes revealed both the challenges and the strategies employed by the educators as they navigated a multicultural environment and adjusted to a foreign education system

1. Navigating Cultural Differences in the Classroom

Participants described initial challenges in adjusting to culturally diverse classrooms in Malaysia. Differences in communication styles, student behavior, and expectations of authority required teachers to modify their classroom management strategies. Many emphasized the need to balance discipline with empathy, particularly when working with less verbally expressive students.

Language also emerged as a significant factor in adaptation. While English served as the main medium of instruction, differences between American and British English created occasional confusion in vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation. Additionally, multilingual classroom environments required teachers to adopt inclusive strategies, including the use of visual aids, simplified instructions, and occasional use of students' native languages.

2. Teaching with Flexibility and Resilience

Participants highlighted adaptability as a core strength in their teaching practice. They adjusted instructional strategies to suit diverse learning needs, using collaborative learning, storytelling, and differentiated instruction. Many attributed their ability to cope to the resourcefulness and flexibility developed through their teaching experiences in the Philippines.

3. Building Belonging and Professional Identity

Over time, participants developed a sense of belonging within their schools by engaging in school activities and building relationships with colleagues. They described a gradual shift in identity from being foreign teachers to becoming integrated members of a multicultural academic community. Cultural openness and humility were key factors in this transformation.

4. Emotional Adjustment and Support Systems

Participants also experienced emotional challenges such as homesickness and culture shock during the early stages of migration. Support systems—including fellow Filipino teachers, school leadership, and online communities—played a crucial role in their adjustment. Coping strategies such as reflection, journaling, and maintaining cultural traditions helped sustain their emotional well-being.

Literature Comparison

Existing literature on Filipino international teachers highlights both professional opportunities and structural challenges associated with teaching abroad. On one hand, globalization has expanded opportunities for Filipino educators, enabling them to gain international experience, develop intercultural competence, and enhance professional growth (Bryan, 2020; Uytico & Abadiano, 2020; Garcia, 2021; Bulawat, 2021).

On the other hand, economic motivations remain a significant driver of migration. Higher salaries, remittance obligations, and improved living conditions are frequently cited as key reasons for working abroad (Bautista & Tamayo, 2020; Masa & Estrellas, 2025; Valladares & Hermosura, 2025).

Studies also identify challenges related to cultural adjustment, including differences in classroom management, language use, and curriculum expectations (Garcia, 2021; Le Roujia & Mahamad, 2024). However, institutional support systems such as mentorship programs and professional learning communities can ease this transition (Dizon & Nanquil, 2024; Apao & Naparan, 2024).

In terms of coping strategies, research highlights both social support networks and individual resilience as critical factors in successful adaptation (Santos & Lee, 2020; Johnson, 2022; Hur et al., 2024). Overall, adaptation emerges as a dynamic process shaped by personal, institutional, and cultural influences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Lived experiences and cultural adaptation of Filipino international teachers in Malaysia.

Table 1. *Emergent Themes on the Lived Experiences and Cultural Adaptation of Filipino International Teachers in Malaysia*

Extracted Experience	Formulated meanings	Emergent themes
1. "Teaching style with the IB student-centered and concept-driven approach." 2. "Encourages learners to be communicator"	The transition to an inquiry-based and student-centered curriculum requires a fundamental shift from traditional teacher-led instructional methods.	Shift to Student-Centered Pedagogy
1. "Ensuring they do not unintentionally conflict with religious or cultural values." 2. "Mindful ako sa paggamit ng global examples... connection kapag nakita nilang interesado ka sa culture nila."	Maintaining sensitivity toward religious beliefs and local traditions is essential for building rapport and meaningful connections with Malaysian students.	Culturally Responsive Teaching and Inclusivity
1. "They value harmony and politeness... some appear too confrontational or overly expressive." 2. "Kailangan malinaw ang classroom management strategies... adjusting my better and guides me."	Understanding the "cultural norms" of students—such as the emphasis on harmony and indirectness—dictates how discipline and classroom interactions are managed.	Navigating Classroom Social Dynamics and Management
1. "May malaking difference din sa communication style." 2. "Using written instructions and visuals to support verbal explanations."	Differences in language nuance and communication styles are bridged through the strategic use of visual aids and explicit written instruction	Bridging Communication and Language Barriers

Formulated Meanings on the Lived Experiences of Filipino International Teachers in Malaysia

The co-researchers were asked to describe in detail their everyday classroom experiences and how they navigate cultural differences in Malaysia. From their narratives, several formulated meanings emerged, supported by significant statements that reflect their lived experiences in the teaching context.

A. *Transitioning to a Student-Centered and Concept-Driven Pedagogy*

Most participants expressed that teaching in Malaysian international schools requires a shift from traditional, teacher-centered instruction to a more student-centered and inquiry-based approach. This pedagogical transition was reflected in the statement of Participant 1:

“Teaching style with the IB student-centered and concept-driven approach.”

This suggests that within the International Baccalaureate (IB) framework, the role of the teacher is redefined from a knowledge transmitter to a learning facilitator. The experience reflects a form of pedagogical unlearning, where emphasis is placed on guiding learners toward conceptual understanding rather than rote memorization.

This shift is further reinforced by another statement from Participant 1:

“[The system] encourages learners to be communicators and risk-takers.”

This indicates that part of the teachers’ lived experience involves cultivating a classroom environment where students are encouraged to express ideas freely and engage in learning even at the risk of making mistakes. For Filipino teachers, this requires a significant adjustment in pedagogical mindset, particularly in balancing instructional authority with student voice and autonomy.

B. Maintaining Cultural and Religious Sensitivity in Instruction

Participants emphasized that their daily teaching practice is shaped by continuous awareness of Malaysia’s cultural and religious context. This is evident in the statement of Participant 2:

“Ensuring they do not unintentionally conflict with religious or cultural values.”

This reflects the lived experience of what may be described as instructional filtering, wherein teachers carefully select content, examples, and classroom discussions to ensure alignment with local Islamic and multicultural sensitivities. Participants noted the importance of being mindful of religious observances, cultural norms, and socially sensitive topics to maintain classroom harmony.

This perspective is supported by Participant 3, who stated:

“Mindful ako sa paggamit ng global examples... mas nagkakaroon ng connection kapag nakita nilang interesado ka sa culture nila.”

This highlights that cultural adaptation is not only about avoiding conflict but also about actively building relational connections. Demonstrating genuine interest in students’ cultural background strengthens trust and enhances engagement, making teaching more meaningful and responsive to learners’ context.

C. Navigating Communication Styles and Classroom Social Dynamics

Participants also identified noticeable differences in communication and social interaction patterns between the Philippines and Malaysia, requiring adjustments in classroom communication strategies. This was reflected in Participant 4’s observation:

“They value harmony and politeness... some [teachers] appear too confrontational or overly expressive.”

This suggests that Filipino teachers often need to recalibrate their communication style, as the typically expressive approach common in Filipino classrooms may be interpreted as overly direct or confrontational in a context where harmony and indirect communication are preferred. As a result, teachers adapt by moderating tone, gestures, and interaction styles to align with student expectations.

This adaptation is further supported by Participant 5:

“May malaking difference din sa communication style... kailangan malinaw ang classroom management strategies.”

This indicates that communication differences necessitate greater clarity and structure in instructional delivery. Teachers often rely on explicit instructions, visual aids, and structured classroom management strategies to bridge potential misunderstandings, particularly when students are less verbally expressive or hesitant to participate.

Analysis and Interpretation

The findings suggest that Filipino international teachers undergo a significant pedagogical and cultural adjustment when transitioning into international school contexts in Malaysia. One of the key transformations involves shifting toward a student-centered, inquiry-based approach, where learners are encouraged to become communicators and risk-takers. This reflects a broader reconceptualization of teaching, from content delivery to facilitation of independent learning.

Yan (2021) emphasizes that educators in international schools must engage in professional reconstruction to align with inquiry-based pedagogies. Similarly, Lucas (2022) argues that student-centered learning aims to develop learners' capacity to independently engage with complex ideas and problem-solving processes.

In addition, the findings highlight the importance of cultural and religious sensitivity in instructional practice. Teachers' experiences of "ensuring they do not unintentionally conflict with religious or cultural values" and their careful use of global examples demonstrate a continuous process of cultural negotiation in the classroom.

Consistent with this, Rahman and Ibrahim (2023) underscore that intercultural adaptation in education requires deep respect for the socio-religious context of learners. Likewise, Alampay (2024) highlights cultural empathy as a critical competency for teachers working in diverse educational environments, as it enhances both engagement and instructional effectiveness.

2. Challenges affect their teaching performance, confidence, and relationships with students and colleagues

Table 2. *Emergent Themes on challenges that affect teaching performance, confidence, and relationships with students and colleagues*

Extracted Experience	Formulated meanings	Emergent themes
1. "I gained confidence, patience, and a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity." 2. "Mas naging confident din ako kasi na-prove ko sa sarili ko na kaya kong mag-thrive."	Overcoming adaptation hurdles leads to a significant increase in self-efficacy and a more profound understanding of global diversity.	Enhancement of Professional Confidence and Resilience
1. "They value harmony and politeness... adjusting my mood and guiding me." 2. "Kailangan malinaw ang classroom management strategies."	Cultural differences necessitate a more refined and structured approach to instruction, ultimately improving the teacher's delivery and management skills.	Refinement of Teaching Performance and Instructional Clarity
1. "Connection kapag nakita nilang interesado ka sa culture nila." 2. "Cultural celebrations also influence school situations and interactions."	Active engagement with the host culture fosters stronger rapport and mutual respect between the teacher, the students, and the community.	Strengthening of Intercultural Relationships and Rapport

Formulated Meanings on the Effects of Cultural Challenges on Professional Performance and Relationships

The co-researchers shared how adapting to a foreign cultural landscape triggered significant changes in their professional identity and teaching efficacy. The transition from a familiar educational environment in the Philippines to the multicultural and multi-religious setting of Malaysia served as a crucible for professional growth. Their responses arrived at the following formulated meanings:

A. Enhancement of Professional Confidence and Resilience

Most participants expressed that successfully navigating the challenges of a new educational system led to a strengthened sense of professional confidence and self-belief. This development was not immediate but emerged gradually through continuous engagement with curriculum demands, classroom management, and cultural expectations. The participants described this process as a form of “becoming,” where sustained adaptation transformed initial difficulties into professional growth and resilience.

This was reflected in Participant 1’s statement:

“I gained confidence, patience, and a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity.”

This suggests that overcoming adaptation challenges is experienced not merely as a professional adjustment but also as a transformative personal journey. The emergence of “patience” indicates a necessary recalibration of expectations, allowing teachers to recognize progress through incremental classroom successes. In this sense, adaptation becomes a form of professional maturation, where educators develop a more global perspective and a stronger sense of competence in managing diverse learning environments. This was further supported by Participant 2:

“I became more confident because I proved to myself that I could thrive.”

This statement reflects how successful adaptation functions as self-validation for Filipino international teachers. Initial experiences of culture shock and uncertainty often give rise to feelings of inadequacy; however, these are gradually replaced by confidence as teachers gain mastery over their new environment. The ability to “thrive” rather than merely survive indicates successful integration of prior pedagogical experience with international teaching expectations.

Overall, participants’ narratives reveal a growing “flexibility of spirit,” where repeated exposure to unfamiliar cultural and instructional demands strengthens emotional resilience. This enhanced confidence often translates into more active participation in school initiatives and collaborative professional roles, as teachers begin to view themselves not as outsiders but as competent contributors within an international academic community.

B. Refinement of Teaching Performance and Instructional Clarity

Participants emphasized that cultural and linguistic differences necessitated a more deliberate, structured, and explicit approach to instruction. Because shared cultural references and informal communication cues were limited, teachers had to reconstruct their instructional delivery to ensure clarity and accessibility for all learners. This process involved simplifying complex concepts and making instruction more universally understandable.

This was reflected in Participant 3’s statement:

“Clear classroom management strategies are necessary.”

This highlights the lived experience of transitioning from intuitive classroom management—often shaped by shared cultural understanding—to a more explicit and systematic approach. In the Malaysian international school context, differences in communication styles and student behavior require teachers to adopt structured strategies such as visual aids, clear rubrics, and step-by-step instructions. This shift represents a movement from intuitive teaching to precision-oriented instruction, where clarity becomes central to pedagogical effectiveness.

This adaptation was further supported by Participant 4:

“They value harmony and politeness... adjusting my delivery guides me to be a better teacher.”

This suggests that alignment with the cultural emphasis on harmony and indirect communication leads to a refinement of instructional style. Filipino teachers, who may be accustomed to more direct or expressive communication patterns, learn to moderate tone, soften disciplinary language, and adopt more empathetic and non-confrontational approaches in classroom interactions.

Beyond instructional delivery, this refinement also extends to intercultural relationships within the classroom. Teachers described becoming more observant and reflective in their communication choices, ensuring that their language and actions align with cultural expectations. Over time, this heightened awareness becomes internalized, resulting in a teaching practice that is both pedagogically structured and culturally responsive.

Ultimately, this refinement positions teachers not only as subject experts but also as cultural mediators who bridge diverse learner backgrounds and academic expectations. Their ability to adapt instructional clarity within a multicultural environment becomes a defining feature of their professional identity and competence in international education settings.

Analysis and Interpretation

The findings suggest that exposure to a foreign educational context significantly contributes to the development of professional confidence, resilience, and instructional refinement among Filipino international teachers. Participants’ experiences of gaining “confidence, patience, and a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity,” as well as their ability to “thrive” in a new environment, indicate that international teaching functions as a catalyst for both personal and professional transformation.

Gomez (2022) emphasizes that overcoming culture shock is essential in developing the self-efficacy required in global classroom settings. Similarly, Alampay (2024) argues that successfully navigating unfamiliar cultural norms strengthens professional identity and enhances teachers’ confidence in managing diverse learners.

In addition, the findings highlight how cultural adaptation leads to more structured and intentional teaching practices. The need for “clear classroom management strategies” and culturally appropriate communication reflects how educators refine their pedagogical approaches in response to contextual demands. This adaptation process results in improved instructional clarity and more effective classroom engagement.

Supporting this, Sitanggang et al. (2025) emphasize that intercultural adaptation enhances teaching clarity and instructional precision. Likewise, Santos (2026) notes that as teachers adjust their management and communication styles to align with local cultural expectations, they develop a more sophisticated pedagogical repertoire that strengthens both teaching effectiveness and teacher–student relationships.

3. Solutions or approaches may be proposed to support Filipino teachers in enhancing their teaching performance, confidence, and relationships with students and colleagues

Table 3. *Strategic Solutions and Approaches to Support Filipino Teachers*

Extracted Experience	Formulated meanings	Emergent themes
1. "Mentorship from senior or experienced teachers... provide valuable insights." 2. "Spaces for dialogue would greatly help Filipino teachers."	Establishing structured peer-support systems and collaborative environments is vital for the successful cultural and professional integration of teachers.	Collaborative Mentorship and Peer-Support Networks
1. "Workshops and regular training programs would greatly help." 2. "Understanding local norms... daily life."	Ongoing professional development focused on cultural literacy and local educational standards is necessary to bridge the adjustment gap.	Institutional Cultural Orientation and Professional Development
1. "Using written instructions and visuals to support verbal explanations." 2. "Instructional materials... inclusive and respectful."	Providing specialized instructional resources and cross-cultural communication training improves the quality of teaching in a foreign setting.	Resource-Based Instructional Support and Communication Training

Formulated Meanings on the Proposed Solutions and Support Mechanisms

The co-researchers provided critical suggestions to improve the transition and support systems for Filipino teachers, emphasizing that while individual resilience is important, it must be bolstered by systemic interventions. Their collective insights led to the following formulated meanings:

A. *Collaborative Mentorship and Peer-Support Networks.*

Participants believed that guidance from those who have already navigated the system is the key to a faster and more efficient adjustment period. For a Filipino teacher entering the Malaysian international school circuit, the learning curve is often steep, involving not just a new curriculum but a completely different set of social expectations. The participants highlighted that "learning by doing" can be exhausting and that a structured "buddy system" would alleviate much of this professional anxiety. This was strengthened by the following statements:

According to Participant 5, *"Mentorship from senior or experienced teachers... provide valuable insights."*

The participant explained that the "lived experience" of veteran teachers serves as a vital roadmap for newcomers. Having a "mentor" significantly reduces the cognitive and emotional stress of adjusting to a new curriculum, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB), and a foreign culture simultaneously. This mentorship acts as a form of "cultural scaffolding," where the mentor provides the necessary support until the new teacher can stand independently in their new environment. This idea was further supported by Participant 1:

"Spaces for dialogue would greatly help Filipino teachers."

This indicates that creating "dialogue spaces" or professional learning communities (PLCs) where Filipino teachers can congregate is vital for creating an "emotional safety net." These spaces allow for the collective sharing of "best practices" specifically tailored to the Malaysian context. The "lived experience" here is the realization that many challenges are not personal failures but common systemic hurdles. By discussing these in a safe space, teachers can engage in "collaborative problem-solving," turning individual struggles into communal wisdom. This peer-support network serves as a bridge, ensuring that the unique pedagogical strengths of Filipino teachers—such as their innate empathy and hard work—are not lost to the frustrations of "cultural fatigue."

B. Institutional Cultural Orientation and Professional Development

The participants suggested that schools should provide formal, intentional training regarding the local culture to prevent "blind" adaptation. Many educators noted that while they were prepared for the academic requirements of their jobs, they were often left to "figure out" the cultural and religious nuances of Malaysia on their own. They argued that schools have a responsibility to bridge this knowledge gap through formal orientation. This was evidenced by the following responses:

Participant 6 observed, *"Workshops and regular training programs would greatly help."*

According to the participant, "institutional intervention" is necessary so that teachers do not have to struggle through "social norms" by trial and error. The "lived experience" of trial and error can often lead to unintentional misunderstandings or "pedagogical friction" in the classroom. Regular workshops provide a structured environment where teachers can ask sensitive questions and receive accurate information about the host country's expectations. This suggests a move toward "Institutionalized Cultural Literacy," where the school actively participates in the teacher's integration process rather than leaving it to chance. This was echoed by Participant 2:

"Understanding local norms... in daily life."

This experience indicates that support should not be limited to the confines of the classroom. Understanding "daily life" in Malaysia—ranging from religious holidays and dietary restrictions to social etiquette and local laws—helps the teacher feel more comfortable and secure in their environment. When a teacher feels "at home" in their community, it eventually translates into better professional performance within the school.

Furthermore, the participants emphasized that these orientation programs should be ongoing, rather than a one-time event during the first week of hire. They proposed "refresher" sessions that coincide with major cultural or religious shifts throughout the school year. This continuous professional development ensures that the teacher's "Cultural Awareness" grows alongside their pedagogical skills. By formalizing this support, the school sends a message of value and inclusivity, which significantly increases teacher morale and retention.

Analysis and Interpretation

In order to strengthen the professional journey of international educators, participants emphasized the importance of establishing structured support systems as a key factor for long-term success. The findings suggest that access to "mentorship from senior or experienced teachers" and opportunities for "spaces for dialogue" play a crucial role in helping teachers navigate the complexities of adapting to a new educational environment. This highlights peer-to-peer collaboration as a significant mechanism for easing the transition into the Malaysian educational context.

In a related discussion on professional induction, Yan (2022) argues that mentorship serves to mitigate “cultural fatigue” among migrant teachers by offering immediate pedagogical and contextual guidance. Similarly, Yan (2021) underscores the value of professional learning communities (PLCs) as collaborative spaces where teachers can exchange best practices and develop the competencies required for international curricula.

Moreover, participants stressed the importance of institutional interventions such as workshops and regular training programs to address gaps in cultural literacy and pedagogical adaptation. They further noted that orientation programs should include a strong focus on understanding “local norms” and everyday sociocultural practices, as these significantly influence classroom interaction and teacher effectiveness.

Consistent with this view, Rahman and Ibrahim (2023) highlight that institutional support is essential in enhancing teaching performance by equipping educators with culturally responsive strategies. Likewise, Santos (2026) emphasizes that sustained training in intercultural communication strengthens teachers’ ability to build positive relationships with both students and colleagues, ultimately contributing to more effective teaching and improved school integration.

Table 4. Phenomenological Framework of the Cultural Adaptation Experiences of Filipino International Teachers in Malaysia

Components	Description
Support Mechanisms and Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative Mentorship and Peer-Support Networks • Institutional Cultural Orientation and Training • Resource-Based Instructional and Communication Support • Exposure to Malaysian Cultural and Religious Practices • Interaction with Diverse Students and Colleagues
Cultural Adaptation and Professional Adjustment Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of cultural awareness and sensitivity • Adjustment to student-centered pedagogy • Adaptation of communication styles • Refinement of classroom management strategies • Building intercultural relationships and rapport • Strengthening confidence, resilience, and flexibility

Lived Professional

- Improved teaching performance

Experiences and Outcomes

- Successful cultural integration
 - Stronger teacher-student relationships
 - Better collaboration with colleagues
 - Enhanced professional competence and global readiness
 - Greater appreciation for cultural diversity
-

The phenomenological framework illustrates the process of cultural adaptation experienced by Filipino international teachers in Malaysia as a gradual and evolving journey shaped by both institutional and interpersonal influences. Adaptation begins through multiple support mechanisms and intercultural encounters, including mentorship, cultural orientation programs, instructional guidance, and daily interactions with diverse students and colleagues within international school environments.

Existing studies emphasize that institutional and instructional support plays a vital role in facilitating teachers' adjustment to multicultural settings by strengthening their cultural competence and professional readiness (Ahmad, Ismail, & Hussin, 2025). In addition, Selvarajoo et al. (2025) highlight that structured school-based support systems contribute significantly to improving teacher effectiveness in culturally diverse classrooms by providing clear guidance and professional scaffolding during the adaptation process.

These experiences collectively shape teachers' professional adjustment as they gradually develop cultural awareness and sensitivity, shift toward student-centered pedagogical approaches, refine communication strategies, and enhance classroom management practices. Supporting this, Ahmad et al. (2023) found that intercultural sensitivity among teachers is developed through sustained exposure to multicultural classrooms, enabling educators to adjust both instructional behaviors and interaction styles in response to diverse learner needs. Similarly, Nang Nashirah, Ahmad, and Makhsin (2023) explain that teacher self-efficacy is closely intertwined with cultural competence, as increased confidence enhances educators' ability to effectively manage culturally diverse learners.

The framework further demonstrates that continuous engagement in multicultural educational contexts strengthens key professional attributes such as confidence, resilience, flexibility, and intercultural relational competence. Ahmad et al. (2025) emphasize that cultural competence develops through ongoing interaction with diverse learners and reflective teaching practice. Likewise, Selvarajoo et al. (2025) note that teachers gradually refine their instructional strategies and adaptability as they navigate varying cultural expectations and student learning behaviors.

Moreover, the framework reveals that successful cultural adaptation leads to a range of positive professional outcomes, including improved teaching performance, stronger teacher–student and collegial relationships, enhanced professional competence, and a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity. Huda et al. (2021) emphasize that sustaining multicultural harmony in educational settings relies on mutual trust, acceptance, and understanding among teachers and learners. In this sense, intercultural experiences become essential in shaping educators' ability to build meaningful relationships and maintain harmony within diverse academic environments.

Furthermore, Huda et al. (2021) explain that intercultural teachers develop heightened cultural awareness and sensitivity through lived experiences in diverse educational contexts. This ongoing process

strengthens their adaptability, emotional intelligence, and professional interaction skills, enabling them to respond more effectively to cultural differences in classroom practice.

Overall, the findings affirm that cultural adaptation is not merely a process of adjustment but a transformative professional experience. It fosters both personal and professional growth by enhancing intercultural understanding, pedagogical flexibility, and relational competence among international teachers working in multicultural educational settings.

Summary of findings

1. On the Lived Experiences and Cultural Adaptation of Filipino International Teachers

The study established that the lived experiences of Filipino international teachers in Malaysia are characterized by a profound socio-pedagogical and cultural transition. The following key findings emerged:

A. *Pedagogical Reconfiguration*

Teachers experience a significant pedagogical transition from the teacher-centered approaches commonly practiced in the Philippines to the inquiry-based and student-centered frameworks implemented in many Malaysian international schools, particularly those following the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. This shift requires educators to redefine their role from being the primary source of knowledge to becoming facilitators of learning who guide students in constructing their own understanding. As a result, teachers encourage learners to become active participants in the learning process by developing skills such as communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and the confidence to take intellectual risks. This transition reflects not only a change in instructional practice but also a broader transformation in teachers' professional perspectives and approaches to learning.

B. *Instructional and Cultural Filtering*

Teachers' lived experiences also reveal the importance of cultural mindfulness in their daily professional practice. Participants described the need to continuously evaluate and adapt lesson content, instructional examples, and classroom interactions to ensure alignment with Malaysia's Islamic values and multicultural norms. This process requires educators to be conscious of cultural sensitivities and respectful of diverse beliefs, traditions, and perspectives represented within the school community. By carefully selecting culturally appropriate materials and approaches, teachers foster an inclusive and harmonious learning environment that promotes mutual respect and meaningful engagement among students from different backgrounds. This ongoing practice of cultural responsiveness becomes an essential component of their professional adaptation and effectiveness in multicultural educational settings.

C. *Communicative Recalibration*

Teachers adjust their communication styles to align with the Malaysian cultural emphasis on harmony, politeness, and respectful interpersonal interactions. Behaviors that may be considered expressive or direct in the Philippine context often require modification to suit local cultural expectations. As a result, educators become more deliberate in their choice of language, tone, and classroom interactions. To enhance understanding and engagement, they frequently utilize non-verbal cues, written instructions, visual aids, and other supportive communication strategies. These adaptations help bridge cultural and communication differences while accommodating students who may be more reserved or less inclined to participate openly in classroom discussions. Through this process, teachers develop greater cultural sensitivity and communication flexibility, contributing to a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

2. On the Effects of Cultural Challenges on Teaching Performance, Confidence, and Relationships

The research found that while the initial phase of adaptation presents significant challenges, the long-term effects on the educators are overwhelmingly positive and transformative:

1. *Enhanced Professional Self-Efficacy*

Successfully navigating the challenges of a foreign educational system serves as a catalyst for both personal and professional development. Participants reported increased professional confidence, resilience, and patience as they adapted to new cultural and institutional expectations. Their experiences of overcoming unfamiliar situations and succeeding within an international teaching environment fostered a strong sense of self-efficacy and accomplishment. This growth enabled them to recognize their capabilities as educators in a globally competitive setting, reinforcing their professional identity and empowering them to approach future challenges with greater confidence and adaptability.

2. *Refinement of Instructional Mastery*

The need to overcome communication and cultural barriers encourages teachers to adopt a more deliberate, organized, and reflective approach to instruction. As they navigate diverse classroom environments, educators develop clearer classroom management strategies, more explicit instructional procedures, and more effective communication techniques to support student learning. These adjustments enhance their pedagogical competence by promoting greater clarity, consistency, and responsiveness in teaching practice. Consequently, teachers become more adaptable and versatile professionals, capable of addressing the needs of learners from diverse cultural backgrounds while maintaining effective and inclusive learning environments.

3. *Deepening of Intercultural Rapport*

The challenges associated with cultural adaptation contribute to the development of cultural empathy among international teachers. Through continuous engagement with and respect for the host culture, educators gain a deeper understanding of their students' values, perspectives, and lived experiences. This heightened cultural awareness enables teachers to build meaningful and empathetic relationships with their learners, fostering trust, mutual respect, and a stronger sense of connection within the classroom. Furthermore, cultural empathy supports positive professional interactions with local colleagues by promoting openness, collaboration, and effective cross-cultural communication. As a result, teachers are better positioned to create inclusive learning environments and establish productive relationships within the broader school community.

3. Proposed Solutions and Support Mechanisms for Filipino International Teachers.

Based on participants' feedback, the study identifies key institutional and peer-driven support mechanisms that contribute to easing the cultural and professional transition of Filipino international teachers in Malaysia. These mechanisms function as enabling structures within the broader process of cultural adaptation and professional adjustment.

A. *Support Mechanisms and Experiences*

The findings highlight the importance of establishing formalized mentorship programs as a foundational support mechanism for newly arrived international teachers. Pairing Filipino educators with experienced mentors or "buddy" teachers provides both emotional support and practical guidance during the initial stages of adaptation. Through these mentoring relationships, new teachers gain valuable insights into classroom management practices, school culture, professional expectations, and the broader educational context in Malaysia. Such support helps reduce uncertainty, promotes confidence, and facilitates a smoother transition into the host

institution, ultimately contributing to more effective professional adjustment and long-term success in the international teaching environment.

B. Institutionalized Cultural Literacy Training

Participants emphasized the importance of sustained professional development that extends beyond initial orientation programs. Continuous training in cultural literacy provides teachers with a deeper understanding of Malaysia's local norms, values, and religious and sociocultural contexts, enabling them to navigate multicultural environments more effectively. Through ongoing learning opportunities, educators strengthen their cultural awareness, intercultural competence, and sensitivity to diverse perspectives. This continuous process of professional growth enhances their ability to respond appropriately to various classroom situations, build positive relationships with students and colleagues, and adapt their teaching practices to meet the needs of culturally diverse learning communities.

C. Creation of Collaborative Dialogue Spaces (Professional Learning Communities)

The establishment of dedicated Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for Filipino expatriate teachers serves as an important collaborative support mechanism within international school settings. These communities provide opportunities for educators to share best practices, exchange culturally responsive teaching strategies, and discuss effective approaches to addressing the challenges of cultural adaptation. Through regular collaboration, reflection, and professional dialogue, teachers gain valuable insights from the experiences of their peers while fostering a sense of belonging and professional solidarity. Furthermore, PLCs help reduce feelings of isolation often experienced by teachers working abroad by creating supportive networks that encourage mutual learning, emotional support, and collective problem-solving. As a result, the process of adaptation becomes a shared professional journey rather than an individual responsibility, contributing to both teacher well-being and professional growth.

D. Instructional Resource Development

Participants also recommended the development of structured instructional toolkits to support teachers during the early stages of their transition into international school settings. These resources may include visual aids, simplified instructional guides, culturally responsive teaching materials, and multilingual support resources that facilitate effective communication between teachers and students. Such tools can help educators navigate language differences, clarify instructional expectations, and enhance student understanding, particularly during their first year of service. By providing practical and accessible teaching resources, instructional toolkits can reduce adjustment difficulties, strengthen classroom effectiveness, and support teachers in delivering inclusiveness and engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are drawn based on the thematic analysis of the lived experiences, professional adaptations, and proposed support mechanisms for Filipino international teachers in Malaysia

A. Pedagogical Transformation and Adaptation

The study concludes that Filipino international teachers in Malaysia experience a significant pedagogical shift from traditional, teacher-centered instruction to student-centered and inquiry-based approaches. The transition to frameworks such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) represents not only a change in curriculum but also a deeper transformation of instructional identity. In this process, teachers move away from the role of primary knowledge providers and

instead assume the role of facilitators who guide learners in developing critical thinking, collaboration, and global competence. This reconfiguration reflects a broader professional adaptation, where educators align their teaching philosophies and practices with international education standards and the demands of multicultural learning environments.

2. **Cultural and Religious Mindfulness as a Core Competency**

It is concluded that “instructional filtering” functions as a critical adaptive strategy for Filipino international teachers working in the Malaysian context. This involves the deliberate and continuous adjustment of teaching content, examples, and classroom interactions to ensure alignment with the socio-religious values of a Muslim-majority society. By exercising cultural sensitivity and awareness of local norms and taboos, teachers are able to navigate potential cultural misunderstandings and maintain respect within the learning environment. This practice serves as an essential bridge for building trust, fostering positive relationships, and sustaining harmony in multicultural classrooms, ultimately supporting more effective and culturally responsive teaching.

3. **Professional Growth through Cultural Challenges**

The research reveals that the challenges of cultural adaptation, including language nuances and differing social norms, function as catalysts for professional development among Filipino international teachers. Rather than hindering teaching effectiveness, these challenges prompt educators to critically reflect on and refine their classroom management practices and communication strategies. As a result, teachers develop greater instructional clarity, patience, and adaptability in their teaching practice. This process also contributes to the enhancement of their self-efficacy, as overcoming initial difficulties strengthens their confidence and reinforces their sense of professional competence within multicultural educational settings.

4. **Recalibration of Communication for Social Harmony**

The study concludes that the typically expressive communication style associated with Filipino educators is gradually recalibrated to align with the Malaysian cultural emphasis on politeness, harmony, and interpersonal restraint. Through this adaptive process, teachers consciously modify their verbal and non-verbal communication by adopting more structured explanations, increased use of visual aids, and a more softened tone in classroom interactions. These adjustments enable educators to effectively bridge cultural and behavioral differences between their instructional approach and the more reserved communication style of their students. Consequently, this recalibration enhances classroom understanding, promotes respectful interaction, and supports the development of a more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment.

5. **The Shift from Individual Resilience to Institutional Support**

While Filipino teachers demonstrate strong inherent resilience and empathy, the study concludes that sustained success in international teaching contexts should not rely solely on individual adaptability and effort. Instead, there is a critical need for systematic institutional support to facilitate smoother professional integration and long-term retention. Such support mechanisms may include formal mentorship programs, localized orientation initiatives that address cultural and contextual realities, and structured spaces for collaborative dialogue among educators. These institutional provisions are essential in reducing adjustment challenges, strengthening professional well-being, and ensuring that teachers are adequately supported as they navigate the complexities of multicultural educational environments.

6. **Strengthened Interpersonal Rapport and Empathy**

The findings lead to the conclusion that the development of “intercultural rapport” is a key outcome of the cultural adaptation process among Filipino international teachers in Malaysia. By actively demonstrating respect for and interest in the host culture, educators are able to establish meaningful and empathetic relationships within the classroom. This rapport fosters a supportive learning environment characterized by trust, mutual understanding, and inclusivity. As a result, stronger connections are formed not only between teachers and students but also with the wider academic community, enhancing collaboration and contributing to a more harmonious multicultural school environment.

7. **The "Intercultural Evolution" Framework**

Ultimately, the research concludes that the professional journey of Filipino international teachers in Malaysia can be understood as a process of intercultural evolution. This evolution reflects the gradual development of pedagogical adaptability, cultural awareness, and professional identity within a multicultural educational context. The findings suggest that when supported by pedagogical flexibility and sustained cultural mindfulness, Filipino educators are able to navigate complex international school environments effectively. In doing so, they not only enhance their teaching competence but also establish themselves as capable, respected, and valuable contributors to the global international education sector.

Recommendations

1. For Educational Policymakers and Academic Institutions

To promote more inclusive and supportive frameworks for international educators, it is recommended that national education authorities in both Malaysia and the Philippines collaborate to establish a standardized Pre-Departure and Post-Arrival Orientation (PDPAO) program. Such a policy should aim to bridge pedagogical differences between the two contexts, with particular emphasis on preparing teachers for inquiry-based instructional systems such as the International Baccalaureate (IB). By aligning expectations, teaching approaches, and classroom practices prior to deployment and during initial adjustment, the transition process can be made more structured and coherent for migrating educators. In this regard, Tan (2021) emphasizes that formalizing orientation and support frameworks ensures that teacher mobility contributes not only to labor migration but also to the enhancement of instructional quality and professional development outcomes.

2. For School Administrators and Human Resource Departments

To enhance teacher retention and promote effective professional integration, school leaders are encouraged to establish a structured peer-mentorship program. This initiative involves pairing newly hired Filipino teachers with experienced local “culture buddies” who can provide ongoing guidance in navigating daily social norms, institutional expectations, and classroom management practices. Through this collaborative arrangement, new teachers are better supported in their adjustment to the school culture and operational routines, facilitating a smoother transition into the host environment.

In support of this, Lee (2022) emphasizes that strong administrative and institutional support is a key determinant in minimizing culture shock and ensuring that teachers are able to effectively apply their professional expertise within the host school context.

3. For the Academic Community

To further enrich the literature on teacher mobility within Southeast Asia, future researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal studies that examine the career trajectories of Filipino international teachers beyond their initial two years of adaptation. Such an approach would offer deeper insights into the long-term evolution of professional identity, pedagogical practice, and intercultural competence among migrant educators. By extending the scope of inquiry into the post-adaptation or “stabilization” phase of international teaching, scholars can better understand how sustained exposure to multicultural environments shapes teaching effectiveness and career development over time. In this regard, Sitanggang et al. (2025) note that expanding research into the “stabilization phase” of international teaching provides educational institutions with a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic and evolving nature of cross-cultural education.

4. For Filipino International Teachers

To foster self-awareness and strengthen peer support among international educators, teachers are encouraged to establish Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within their respective regions in Malaysia. These “dialogue spaces” can function as collaborative platforms where educators share culturally responsive instructional materials, exchange effective teaching strategies, and discuss practical coping mechanisms for classroom and cultural challenges. Through sustained professional dialogue, teachers are able to reflect on their practices and collectively refine their approaches to multicultural teaching contexts.

In this regard, Alampay (2024) emphasizes that when teachers transition from individual coping and survival strategies to collective sharing and collaboration, there is a notable improvement in both professional confidence and overall mental well-being.

5. For Future Researchers and Aspiring Educators

For individuals preparing for international teaching opportunities, it is recommended that they engage in cultural literacy pre-training that extends beyond language proficiency to include a deeper understanding of social norms, expectations of social harmony, and relevant religious and cultural considerations in the host country. Such preparation can better equip educators to navigate complex intercultural classroom dynamics and respond appropriately to diverse educational contexts. Future research may also examine the impact of Filipino international teachers on the academic performance and learning outcomes of Malaysian students, as this remains an underexplored area in the existing literature. Santos (2026) argues that incorporating the “receiver’s perspective”—referring to the experiences and outcomes of students—is essential in completing a more holistic understanding of international teacher adaptation and its broader educational implications.

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